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ABSTRACT

The impact of successful completion of the General Educational Development (GED) testing program upon the candidates and on the perceptions of their employers was analyzed. Questionnaires were returned by 241 successful GED candidates and 52 of their employers in DeKalb County, Illinois for the period 1970-79. Over one-half of the 428 successful GED candidates contacted returned their questionnaires. Over one-half of these respondents indicated self-satisfaction as their primary reason for taking the GED test battery; an additional 40 percent indicated their primary reason was to qualify for further educational opportunity and employment or promotion. Respondents were nearly evenly divided concerning whether the GED provided new opportunities. One-third indicated a job change within 1 or 2 years after their GED success. Approximately two-thirds indicated they had not received their present employment as a result of GED success, although over 14 percent found that the GED certificate was related to successful employment. Almost 15 percent indicated they had attempted no new educational programs within 1 or 2 years following GED test completion. Employers generally found GED personnel successful in work assignments and were as satisfied with them as they were with other employees. Many employers were impressed with the improved self-image of GED completers. (Nine tables are appended.) (YLB)

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Impact of the Successful Completion of the GED on Candidates and Their Employers

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the perceptions of successful GED candidates and their employers in DeKalb County, Illinois for the period of 1970-1979. The data was obtained by two questionnaires, the first was completed by the candidates about their perceptions of the impact of the GED; the second instrument asked employers to rate their GED employees in performance areas.

The findings indicate that GED candidates maintain longevity of employemnt and are equally successful on the job as are graduates of traditional high schools.

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Impact of the Successful Completion of the GED on Candidates and Their Employers

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America has been experiencing a learning boom. Between 1957 and 1975 the number of adults involved in continuing their education grew from 8.2 million to 17.1 million. (Hechinger, 1979: 125-128) This growth in continuing education springs primarily from two sources: American faith in the idea that we can make better lives for ourselves with greater self-fulfillment; and an unstable job market, which means some involuntary, as well as voluntary, career changes. The National Center for Educational Statistics has stated that the closer one is to the attainment of a high school credential, the more likely he is to participate in adult education programs such as the General Educational Development (GED) testing program. Such programs offer a second opportunity to many who did not successfully complete their early schooling.

The General Educational Development testing program was developed in 1942 for men and women who were returning home from service during World War II. These individuals had their high school educational training interrupted by this war. Later this testing program was made available to any person who had not earned a high school diploma. Such a testing program provided applicants with an opportunity to secure an evaluation of their educational maturity and competence, and could prove of value in helping them meet high school graduation requirements for employment, entry into training, promotion in industry, admission to college, or for personal satisfaction.

In October, 1973, there were 57,668,179 Americans who had completed less than the necessary units of credit required for a high school diploma. (Haughe, 1975: 49-53) This figure was approximately 40 percent of the total adult population. According to the 1970 census figures, there were 3,229,596 persons or 43 percent of the adult population in the State of Illinois who had not earned a high school diploma. Of all 16 to 24 year old workers who were not enrolled in school in October, 1971, approximately 20 percent had left school prior to earning a high school diploma. These individuals have greater difficulty in the job market than those with a high school education or more. With the increase in layoffs and a demand for less unskilled labor, recent school dropouts have faced even greater job-seeking competition, and the unemployment rate for this young group has doubled. (Young, 1974: 33-36)

Former Vice-President Walter Mondale's Task Force on Youth Employment has concluded that unless their basic education and job skills are upgraded, some four million young people between the ages of 14 and 21 may fail to make the successful transition from school to work during the 1980's. Compounding the problem is the economy's shift from factory to office, causing jobs to be more technical and to require increasingly sophisticated skills. For example, in 1950, 34 percent of all jobs were open to young people who did not possess a high school diploma. By 1970 only 8 percent of the jobs were open to the 26 percent of the U.S. young people who had 11 years of education or less. (Perkinson, 1979: 28-31)

By October, 1973, 785,000 Americans aged from 16 to 24 left school without receiving a high school diploma. The school dropout has had a direct impact on employment. Male dropouts had an unemployment rate of 24 percent, over twice the 9 percent rate for male high school graduates not enrolled

in college. (Micholette, 1974: 48-52) A comparison of the unemployment rate of those who left high school without a diploma with that of high school graduates of the same age and sex showed that those who did not finish their high school program had nearly twice the rate of unemployment as did the high school graduates.

The GED tests focus on intellectual skills and knowledge which are largely related to the major academic studies. (Brumbaugh, 1956: 11) The GED tests are used as a basis for issuing a secondary school equivalency certificate, as a guidance device in counseling individuals regarding their academic strength or weakness, and to point out needed additional studies in cases where individuals desire further education or training. (Brumbaugh, 1956: 20) The GED tests provide a valuable and necessary alternative means of demonstrating educational achievement for many who have not completed high school requirements. (Brumbaugh, 1956: 30) The demonstration of educational achievement by successful completion of the GED tests constitutes an alternative avenue into college or into positions in business, industry, or government.

Today, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, six United States territories, as well as most Canadian provinces and territories now utilize the GED tests as a basis for issuing high school equivalency certificates. During 1979 there were 2,799 official GED centers in operation. Between 1974 and 1979 at least 21, 121,982 equivalency certificates were issued across the nation to adults who had successfully completed the battery of tests. (GED Statistician Report, 1979: 16)

Why Take the GED Test Series?

Available literature relative to the GED program lists four basic reasons why individuals would desire to complete the GED test battery. First, an individual may wish to document his qualifications for further educational opportunity. If he can earn a qualifying score on the series of tests, college admission may be possible, or he may qualify for meeting the requirements of a licensing board. Second, an individual may desire to qualify for employment or a promotion within his field of work. his employment or promotion may be contingent upon the candidate's successfully achieving a certificate of equivalence. Michelotte's (1973) study suggested the school dropout was much more likely than the high school graduate to be a long-term unemployed person. A comparison of the unemployment rates of dropouts and high school graduates of the same age and sex shows school dropouts experience nearly twice the rate of unemployment as do high school graduates. Many industries will accept the GED equivalency certificate as a substitute for the high school diploma. Historically, business and industry have generally accepted individuals holding a GED credential for employment in those jobs requiring high school graduation as qualification. (American Council on Education, 1971: 1) Third, some individuals desire to prove to themselves and others that they have the educational ability of a high school graduate. Fourth, other individuals attempt to complete the series of GED tests in order to gain the satisfaction experienced from possessing a high school diploma or equivalency certificate. (American Council on Education, 1956: 8)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of successful completion of the GED upon the candidates and on the perceptions of their employers. The study involved successful GED candidates and their employers in DeKalb County, Illinois for the period 1970-1979.

Methodology

The study sought the perceptions of successful GED candidates concerning the GED testing program in DeKalb County, Illinois. The questions asked candidates were:

1. Did they change their employment within 2 years after finishing the GED?
2. Did they enter into academic, technical or apprentice programs following GED completion?
3. Why did they wish to take the GED?

The study also sought perceptions of the employers of individuals who successfully completed the GED series. The questions asked of employers were:

1. Did they find their GED employees successful in their work assignments?
2. Were they satisfied with the work-related growth of their GED employees?
3. How did they compare their GED employees with employees who were traditional high school graduates concerning their local employee training programs.

Information provided by the GED respondents was used to determine the type of work they regularly performed as well as the identify of the respondent's employer. An employer questionnaire was developed and was mailed to each identified employer. Each survey and envelope was numbered for identification purposes. Each employer questionnaire returned was matched with the survey form of the person who had successfully completed the GED test series and had provided that employer's identify.

Findings

This study identified 927 successful GED candidates. It was possible to locate 42[illegible] persons and 241 (56%) individuals returned their questionnaires. Eighty-eight candidates identified their employers. Questionnaires were sent to the 88 employers and 52 (59%) were returned for analysis.

Insert Table 1

The data in Table 1 shows that GED recipients do experience some degree of longevity in their employment. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents indicated they had been in their present position for at least one year. Just over 45 percent indicated they had held the same position in excess of two years. The male respondents indicated a longevity rate of 84.6 percent with one year in their position. The female respondents indicated that 67.2 percent had one year in their current position.

Insert Table 2

The data in Table 2 indicates that over one-third of the respondents did experience an employment change within one year or two years after receiving the Certificate of Equivalence.

Insert Table 3

A total of 49 individuals enrolled in an academic program; 10 individuals opted for a technical training program; and 2 individuals began apprenticeship programs. This data are displayed in Table 3.

Insert Table 4

The data in Table 4 show that 14.6 percent of the GED respondents believed their present position was attained as a direct result of their success with the GED program in DeKalb County, Illinois. The vast majority, over two-thirds, of the respondents indicated this was not the case. Over 80 percent of the male respondents and nearly 63 percent of the female respondents declared they held their present position as a result of job skills rather than as a result of attaining a passing score on the GED test battery.

Insert Table 5

Insert Table 6

Those who responded to the questionnaire indicated these persons have been either very successful or generally successful. Only two employers indicated that their employees, GED recipients, were performing in a less than satisfactory manner when compared to typical high school graduate employees. One employer's comment seems to embody the sentiment of several employers. He stated "...those with the drive to complete the GED program are those with enough initiative to do well on the job."

Insert Table 7

The data reported in Table 7 show that a total of 9 (3.7%) of the employers indicated they were more satisfied with the work-related growth of their GED employees, while 4 (1.7%) indicated less satisfaction with GED personnel when compared to the traditional high school graduates. The majority of employers (130 of 241 or 53.9%) indicated they were equally satisfied with their GED employees when compared with employees who had graduated from high school.

Insert Table 8

The data in Table 8 showed that a small number (25 or 10.4%) of the employers indicated any knowledge of the impact of the GED on employees. Several comments were provided by employers who did not answer the question with a "yes" or "no" response. Some of these comments included the following: "GED helps restore people's confidence." "GED recipients exhibit more self-esteem and assuredness." "I noticed a change in the personal satisfaction on the part of the GED recipient."

There were 109 employers who responded negatively to the question, indicating that they were not aware of any impact on their employees which was caused by the GED program. An additional 107 employers (44.4%) did not respond to the question. Combining these two figures, 216 (89.6%) of the employers offered the opinion that they were not aware of any impact by the GED program on their employees who are certificate recipients.

Insert Table 9

The data reported in Table 9 indicated that the majority (138 of 241 or 57.3%) indicated their GED employees were equally capable of being

trained. Only 6 employers (2.5%) indicated GED employees were more difficult to train.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

What perceptions do the successful candidates possess concerning the GED testing program in DeKalb County, Illinois?

The pertinent findings were:

1. Over one-half of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated their primary reason for desiring to write the GED test battery was for self-satisfaction. An additional 40 percent indicated their primary reason for GED testing was to qualify for further educational opportunity (22.4%) and employment or promotion (17.8%).

2. The questionnaire respondents were nearly evenly divided concerning whether the GED tests provided new opportunities, with 49.4 percent indicating in the affirmative and 45.2 percent recording a negative response.

3. Nearly 60 percent of the questionnaire respondents indicated their GED success did not produce a job assignment change within one or two years of test completion. However, one-third of the certificate recipients who responded to the questionnaire did indicate they experienced a job change within one or two years after their GED test success.

4. Approximately two-thirds of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they had not received their present employment as a result of GED success, although 35 (14.6%) of the 241 respondents identified the GED certificate as related to successful employment.

5. A great majority (74.7%) of the questionnaire respondents indicated they had attempted no new educational programs within one or two years following the GED test completion.

6. Three-fourths of the questionnaire respondents rated their instructional assistance preparatory to GED testing as adequate (43.6%) or more than adequate (31.1%).

7. Approximately one-half of the responding group rated their after GED test counseling as adequate (34.4%) or more than adequate (15.8%). However, 94 respondents (39%) indicated they did not receive post-test counseling assistance.

8. The certificate recipients who responded to the questionnaire were generally opposed (58.9%) to allowing high school students opportunity for earlier than usual graduation by a proficiency test.

Conclusion. The General Educational Development Testing Program should continue to be an alternative means for a person to secure a secondary school credential. In particular, the DeKalb County GED testing program has provided a useful societal educational opportunity.

Discussion. The majority of the certificate recipients, who responded to the questionnaire, indicated their primary reason for desiring to write the GED test series was social. That is, they felt they were educationally outside the mainstream of society. The GED testing program was viewed by the respondents as a means of changing that position. While many of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated they had not engaged in additional study, or had not experienced post-GED job change opportunity, the fact remains that their educational status has been elevated. These persons indicated that they are better prepared for the future.

What perceptions do DeKalb County business and industrial employers possess regarding the GED testing program in DeKalb County, Illinois?

The findings for this question were as follows:

1. Employers who hire and supervise GED personnel generally find these employees successful in their work assignments.

2. The vast majority (97%) of the employees who responded to this question indicated they were equally satisfied with their GED recipient employees when compared with other employees who had completed a formal secondary school program. It should be noted that 59 percent of the employees responded to the questionnaire.

3. The vast majority (95%) of the employees who responded to this question indicated their GED employees were equally capable of training when compared to employees who completed a formal secondary school program. It should be noted that 59 percent of the employers responded to the questionnaire.

4. Many of the employers who responded to the questionnaire indicated they were impressed with the improved self-image for the employees who had successfully completed the GED test series.

Conclusion. The employers, as a group, have a favorable attitude toward the GED testing program. The GED certificate completion appeared to enhance their employees' self-image and job-related success.

Discussion. The majority of the employers indicated their support for the GED testing program in DeKalb County as vitally important.

SUMMARY

This study indicates that successful GED candidates feel that they

have gained equivalence to the minimum educational standards of our society. This accomplishment was very important to them as individuals! Moreover, employers acknowledged that GED completion enhanced their employees self-image and job related success. Most importantly, employers rated GED successful candidates as equal in job success and were willing to provide training opportunities to these persons for new roles.

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Table 1

Length of Service in Present Position for GED Recipients Who Responded to Questionnaire, DeKalb County, Illinois, 1970 Through 1979

Length of Service	GED Respondents		Male GED Respondents		Female GED Respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Held Present Position Less Than One Year	31	(12.9)	5	(7.0)	26	(15.3)
Held Present Position One to Two Years	21	(8.7)	8	(11.3)	13	(7.7)
Held Present Position Two to Three Years	32	(13.3)	10	(14.1)	22	(12.9)
Held Present Position More Than Three Years	109	(45.2)	42	(59.2)	67	(39.4)
No Response	48	(19.9)	6	(8.4)	42	(24.7)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0

Table 2

Change of Job Assignments for GED Recipients, DeKalb County, Illinois, 1970 Through 1979

Change of Job Assignment?	GED Respondents		Male GED Respondents		Female GED Respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, Respondent Changed Job Assignment Within 1 or 2 Years	87	(36.1)	26	(36.6)	61	(35.9)
No, Respondent Did Not Change Job Assignment Within 1 or 2 Years	142	(58.9)	40	(56.4)	102	(60.0)
Respondent Did Not Answer Question	12	(5.0)	5	(7.0)	7	(4.1)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 3

Type of Education Entered into Within One or Two Years by GED Recipients Who Responded to Questionnaire DeKalb County, Illinois, 1970-1979

Type of Program	GED Respondents N	%	Male GED Respondents N	%	Female GED Respondents N	%
Academic	49	(20.4)	12	(16.9)	37	(21.7)
Technical	10	(4.1)	6	(8.5)	4	(2.4)
Apprentice	2	(.8)	1	(1.4)	1	(.6)
No Further Programs	180	(74.7)	52	(73.2)	128	(75.3)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 4

Present Position as a Direct Result of Your GED Success, GED Questionnaire Respondents, DeKalb County, Illinois, 1970 Through 1979

Response	GED Respondents N	%	Male GED Respondents N	%	Female GED Respondents N	%
Yes	35	(14.6)	8	(11.3)	27	(15.9)
No	164	(68.0)	57	(80.3)	107	(62.9)
No Response	42	(20.4)	6	(8.4)	36	(21.2)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 5

Reason Why Questionnaire Respondents Desired to Take GED Test Battery, DeKalb County, Illinois 1970 Through 1979

Reason for Writing GED Test Battery	Sex	Ages Under 20	Ages 20-29	Ages 30-39	Ages 40-49	Ages 50-Up	Total
To Qualify for Further Educational Opportunity	M	6	6	1	1	1	15 (21.1)
	F	6	12	11	9	1	39 (22.9)
To Qualify for Employment or Promotion within a Field of Work	M	3	1	5	2	6	17 (23.9)
	F	3	9	7	4	3	26 (15.3)
To Qualify for Entrance into Military Service	M	0	1	0	0	0	1 (1.4)
	F	2	0	0	0	0	2 (1.2)
To Prove to One-self He Has Ability of High School Graduate	M	3	5	1	6	3	18 (25.4)
	F	3	5	9	11	10	38 (22.4)
To Gain Satisfaction Which One Derives from Possessing Diploma	M	1	7	2	3	2	15 (21.1)
	F	7	16	17	9	6	55 (32.4)
No Response	M	1	1	1	2	0	5 (7.5)
	F	0	3	4	1	2	10 (5.8)
Total	M	14 (19.7)	21 (29.6)	10 (14.1)	14 (19.7)	12 (16.9)	71 (100.0)
	F	21 (12.4)	45 (26.5)	48 (28.2)	34 (20.0)	22 (12.9)	170 (100.0)

Table 6

Are GED Employees Successful in Their Work Assignments?
Employers of GED Questionnaire Respondents,
DeKalb County, Illinois

Employers Ratings of GED Employees	GED Respondents		Male GED Respondents		Female GED Respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Successful	25	(10.5)	8	(11.3)	17	(10.0)
Generally successful	117	(48.5)	33	(46.5)	84	(49.4)
Less Successful Than Regular High School Graduates	2	(.8)	0	--	2	(1.2)
No Response	97	(40.2)	30	(42.2)	67	(39.4)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 7

Employers' Opinions of Work-Related Growth of GED Employees, Employers of GED Questionnaire Respondents, DeKalb County, Illinois

Employers' Opinions	GED Respondents		Male GED Respondents		Female GED Respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
More Satisfied with GED Employee	9	(3.7)	3	(4.2)	6	(3.5)
Equally Satisfied With GED Employee	130	(53.9)	38	(53.5)	92	(54.1)
Less Satisfied with GED Employee	4	(1.4)	0	--	4	(2.4)
No Response	98	(40.7)	30	(42.3)	68	(40.7)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 8

Employers' Perceptions of Impact of GED Tests on Their Employees, DeKalb County, Illinois

Employers' Perceptions	GED Respondents N	%	Male GED Respondents N	%	Female GED Respondents N	%
Yes, GED Tests Do Cause Impact on Employee	25	(10.4)	4	(5.6)	21	(12.35)
No, GED Tests Do Not Cause Impact on Employee	109	(45.2)	30	(42.3)	79	(46.45)
No Response	107	(44.4)	37	(52.1)	70	(41.2)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.0)

Table 9

Employers' Ratings of GED Employees' Participation in Local Training Programs, DeKalb County, Illinois

Employer Opinions	GED Respondents N	%	Male GED Respondents N	%	Female GED Respondents N	%
GED mployee More Difficult to Train	6	(2.5)	5	(7.0)	1	(.6)
GED Employee Equally Capable of Training	138	(57.3)	36	(50.7)	102	(60.0)
No Response	97	(40.2)	30	(42.3)	67	(39.4)
Total	241	(100.0)	71	(100.0)	170	(100.)